

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

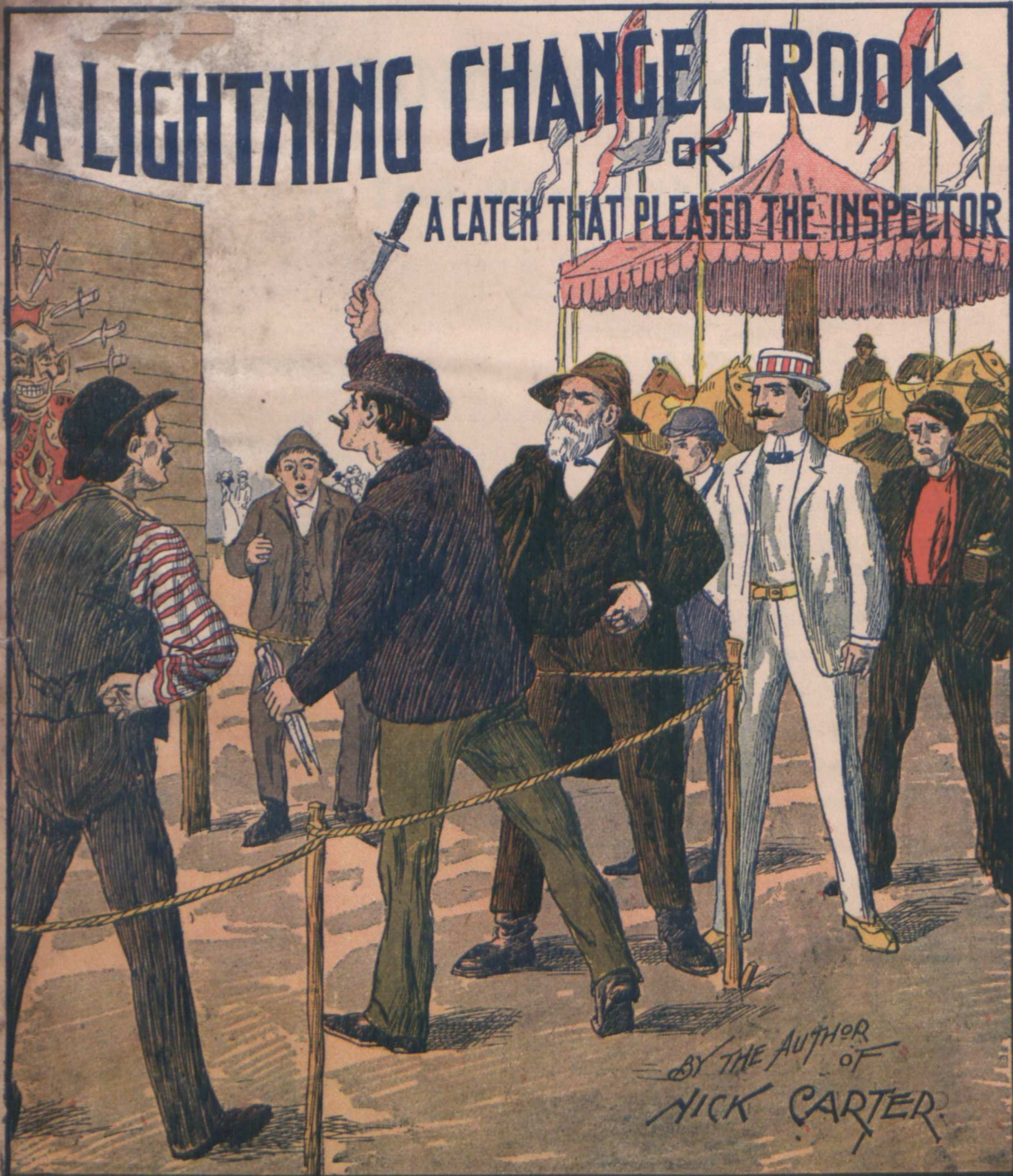
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A LIGHTNING CHANGE CROOK OR

A CATCH THAT PLEASSED THE INSPECTOR



BY THE AUTHOR OF
NICK CARTER

THE TOUGH RAISED ONE OF THE KNIVES AND WITH A QUICK "HERE SHE GOES!" FLUNG IT WITH A PRACTICED HAND.

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A LIGHTNING CHANGE CROOK; OR,

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By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

A CUNNING RASCAL AT WORK.

A tall, well-dressed, handsome-featured young man, with flashing black eyes and an easy manner, stopped before the door of a flat on West One Hundred and Seventy-sixth street, New York, and saying softly to himself, "Now for a trial of the canary bird trick," knocked nervously, and showed an agitated face when the maid servant appeared.

"Pardon me," he said, in his sweetest, most engaging tones, "but is your mother in?"

Now this maid servant was old—that is, she was past her prime, and had crows'-feet, gray hair, false teeth, and a retreating chin—and she relished chestnuts, provided they were good ones, and particularly if they were well coated with the sugar of flattery.

Therefore, when the smart young man before her asked, "Is your mother in?" and looked at her at the same time with a glance in which respect was blended with admiration, she blushed, then dropped her eyes, and

simperingly answered:

"I have no mother; I am——"

"No mother! How I pity you, for I, too, am an orphan."

She might have had her suspicions excited if he had pursued this line of acting much further—for his voice was beginning to grow tremulous and a sympathetic moisture was gathering in his eyes—had he not checked his emotion to remark abruptly:

"But business is business. We may be unfortunate, but the world is cruel, and its stern responsibilities should not be shirked."

"Yes, sir," she murmured, with a reverential expression of face.

He awed as well as attracted her.

"You were about to inform me," he went on, with a look of courteous inquiry, that——"

"That I am not related to the mistress of the house," she interrupted.

She was about to confess herself the servant, but a feeling of pride that had been in-

voked by the young man's language and looks made her hold her tongue in that respect.

"I will summon her," she said, instead.

He bowed, and presently the lady of the house stepped into the hall.

She was young, but matronly looking, and her kind countenance expressed more than ordinary curiosity when she observed that the stranger was handsome and perturbed.

"In what way can I serve you?" she asked.

"Pardon me for my intrusion, madam," the stranger began, politely, "but I am in search of a pet canary."

"Oh!"

The lady looked disappointed.

She had anticipated an interesting revelation.

"The bird belongs to my wife, who fairly dotes on it. To lose it would almost break her heart, I think."

"What a pity!"

"Indeed it is, madam," the young man earnestly proceeded, "and if I do not recover Regina, I shall expect to find the services of a physician necessary when I return home."

"In what way can I help you?" the lady of the house interrogated.

"You can help me very materially," he said, quickly, "for some boys I met on the street below here told me that Regina had flown into one of your windows. The little darling knows my voice," he went on, as he coolly walked past her and into the parlor, "and if you will kindly permit me I will make a search for her."

She was about to interpose an objection to this proposition, for some of the rooms of

the house were in disorder, when he returned and said, with most engaging frankness and earnestness:

"What makes me especially anxious to recover Regina is the fact that my poor wife is a bedridden invalid, and the bird has been her main solace for years. In this next room I think the boys said," he concluded.

The lady's sympathies were now fully aroused, and without the least suspicion that her confidence was being abused she led the way toward her private apartments, and the search began.

After every cranny and corner of the bedroom had been peered into without success the stranger suggested that the lady herself continue the search in the adjoining boudoir.

The suggestion was followed; but still no bird was found.

Other apartments of the house were visited with no better success.

The stranger seemed to be terribly disappointed.

His handsome face was grave and sad when he took his leave after profuse apologies for the trouble and inconvenience he had caused.

Five minutes after his departure the lady of the house made an alarming discovery.

She had occasion to look for her well-filled pocketbook, which she had left on the bureau in her bedroom.

It was gone.

She was sure it was there when she left the room at the request of the stranger to go into the bedroom.

The man who wanted to find a lost canary was the thief beyond the shadow of a doubt.

He had taken advantage of her short ab-

sence from the bedroom to filch the pocket-book.

All his explanations had been lies, and he had resorted to a plausible trick to gain an entrance to the house.

Over one hundred dollars had been stolen.

The loss was a heavy one; all the ready money, in fact, that the lady possessed.

The thief must be captured at once and made to disgorge.

Hurrying out she found a policeman, described the appearance of the canary bird fakir, and then anxiously awaited his capture.

But no arrest was made that day nor the next.

A few hours later the slick stranger operated in another quarter, in Harlem.

Ascending the steps to a flat on West One Hundred and Thirtieth Street his knock brought an elderly lady to the door.

"This is the fourth flat, I believe," he said, in his politest tones.

"Yes, sir; it is."

"I see by the sign on the front that it is to let," he went on, "and I should like to look it over."

The tenant expressed astonishment that such was the case, as she had a long lease on the premises.

"It is very strange," the young man returned, with a puzzled expression on his handsome face, "but the sign is there, and if you step below you can see it."

Urged by curiosity and impressed by the respectful, gentlemanly bearing of the stranger, the tenant of the fourth flat went below.

The young man did not follow her.

And his eyes sparkled with satisfaction

when he noted the fact that she had neglected to lock her door behind her.

When she disappeared from view he rushed inside the flat, snatched a case containing valuable jewelry, and then fled, passing the owner of the property on the stairs as she was slowly climbing the four flights.

She had not found the sign "To Let" and she would have spoken to the stranger and told him he had made a mistake if he had given her time to do so.

His hurried departure without a word of explanation aroused her suspicions, and she hastened to her room to ascertain that she had been robbed.

The police were notified, but the thief was not caught.

And while the worthy conservators of the public morals were striving to capture the clever robber, that enterprising young man was engaged upon a third venture a few blocks from the scene of the second.

From the directory in the hallway he learned that Miss Sarah Jones was the tenant of the top floor.

Hurrying up the stairs he stopped at the second floor, and attracting the attention of the tenant by his loud cries, excitedly said:

"Run up stairs, quick! Miss Jones has broken her arm, and needs help. Quick, for she's suffering terribly."

The kind-hearted tenant hastened to the top floor only to find that she had been deceived.

When she returned to her own apartments all her money and valuables were gone.

While a policeman was listening to the story of the third robbery, a telegraph line

man was operating on a roof two doors below.

He was a young man of handsome face, piercing black eyes, and an expression of shrewd intelligence.

After the policeman had departed with the promise that the thief should not escape him, if he remained in Harlem, the lineman opened the scuttle of a house adjoining the one upon which he had ostensibly been working, and disappeared from sight.

In a very short time he returned to the roof, his pockets filled with valuables.

Descending to the street by the way he had come he hastened away, and was seen in that neighborhood no more.

His pilfering for the day amounted to over a thousand dollars in money and about three thousand dollars in watches and jewelry.

The next day, by means of other devices and subterfuges, he increased his ill-gotten wealth until it approximated ten thousand dollars in value.

And though many detectives and policemen were put upon his trail, not one of them succeeded in running him down.

To use Superintendent Byrnes' own words, "He was the cutest and most daring criminal that had ever worked his points in New York."

Tom Dalton was a substitute patrolman, whose beat was in Harlem, and to him had one of the tales of robbery been told.

Tom was a stalwart, manly, and intelligent fellow, and his highest ambition was to become a permanent member of the metropolitan police force.

He knew that Chief Inspector Steers had glanced at his figure and carriage approving-

ly more than once, and he was burning with a desire to distinguish himself, in order that his promotion from sub to regular might be hastened.

On the forenoon succeeding the series of operations performed by the smart young man with the handsome face and the brilliant black eyes, Tom Dalton was patrolling his beat and thinking of the bright future that would be unfolded to his view if he could but place his hand on the shoulder of—

His musings were cut short by the light pressure of a hand upon his own shoulder.

He turned quickly to behold a youngish man, with a black, silky beard and sparkling black eyes, who was dressed in a neatly fitting gray tweed suit, and who had a prosperous business air about him.

"Excuse me," was his courteous, deferential salutation, "but am I addressing Mr. Thomas Dalton, of East One Hundred and Thirty-sixth Street?"

"You are," answered the sub-patrolman, with a touch of dignity.

"Who keeps company with Miss Marcia Holley of Manhattanville?"

"Er—I don't see——" began Dalton, with a frown.

"You will, presently," quickly interrupted the young man, who smiled urbanely and disclosed two rows of milk-white teeth in the operation, "for I am her messenger."

"She sent you to me?" queried the officer, as he gazed at the stranger with professional scrutiny.

"Yes."

"What's the matter? Is she in trouble?"

Honest Tom Dalton's ruddy face began to pale as the thought of possible danger to

the buxom servant maid of Manhattanville occurred to him.

"She is in the best of health and in no trouble whatever," the black-bearded young man hastened to explain. "She has got important news for you, and as I was passing—I am a canvasser for an art house, you must understand—she took occasion to ask me if I would not deliver a message to you.

"I promised cheerfully, for I was going your way."

"The message—what is it?"

Tom Dalton was growing impatient.

"She says she knows where to put her hands on the bold thief who raised such a hullabaloo in Harlem yesterday."

"The devil she does," exclaimed the ambitious sub-officer in great excitement.

"Where—where is he, then?"

"Not far from here."

"Where?"

"West One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street."

"Let's go there immediately."

"It's not on your beat."

"That's so," ruefully.

"But you can get off in a few hours, can't you?"

"Yes, at noon."

"Then, what's the matter with your going around there this afternoon?"

"Nothing's the matter."

"Then tell the captain all about it, and get a detail, or," with a meaning look, "say nothing, and slip around and make the arrest alone. The reward——"

"Yes, I'll do it."

"Alone?"

"Certainly."

"I'll go with you, but you may take all the glory and all the reward. I'm well fixed, and don't care."

The young man twirled the heavy gold chain attached to his watch as he spoke, and gazed contentedly into space.

At another time Tom Dalton might have thought that it was rather singular that the canvasser of an art house, a man who must be working for a moderate salary, should scoff at the chance of making two thousand dollars, for a reward of that amount had been offered for the apprehension of the bold and cunning criminal.

But just now the worthy officer's mind had room only for thoughts of his sweetheart and the promotion that would come with the arrest.

"You may come along if you want," he said, with a patronizing manner.

The young man smiled.

"I would like nothing better," he said, "than to witness the capture of this remarkable robber, for if he is not placed behind bolts and bars right off he may steal all the portable property in this part of New York. I never heard of such a cool cuss in my life, did you?"

"No. He takes the pineapple for audacity and shrewdness combined."

"But you will catch him, though."

"I will if I once put my lamps on him."

"By the way," he added, as a sudden thought struck him, "how did Marcia—Miss Holley—find out that this dangerous rascal was located on West One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street?"

"She saw him go out of a flat which he had robbed."

"How did she know he had got in his work?"

"The tenant made the discovery of her loss a moment after the robber left the house. She ran after him, and he took to his heels."

"Well?"

"Miss Holley was coming from the park, and heard the tenant's excited cries, and saw the fleeing man, and instantly she made up her mind that she would follow the fellow."

"Bless her heart; she's the girl for me. Go on!"

"As he turned a corner she hailed a cab, and told the driver to follow the fugitive, but without informing cabby of the character of the young man."

"After seeing the robber enter a flat on West One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street and ascertaining that he lived there with his wife, and that his name was Perkins, she was driven home."

"Her one desire after she had located the robber," the stranger went on, "was to send word to you in order that you might make the arrest."

"Being unable to leave her work she was obliged to send her message, and I was chosen to deliver it."

The alleged messenger paused for a moment, and perhaps an expression that suddenly crept into his auditor's face may have induced him to carry his explanations a little further.

"You are perhaps wondering," he glibly resumed, "why Miss Holley condescended to favor me with her confidence, why she told me the man she pursued was a noted criminal for whose arrest Steers would give his head."

"I hadn't thought of the matter before," rejoined Dalton, quickly, "but now that you mention it I——"

"Of course you do. The most natural thing in the world," was the smooth, insinuating interruption. "Any one with a grain of common sense would have his suspicions aroused if a proper explanation were not forthcoming. Now listen to me; Miss Holley opened her heart because I am engaged to marry her sister, Carrie."

"Who lives in Brooklyn?"

"The same."

"I didn't know that Carrie had a beau," was the sub-patrolman's surprised comment.

"She hasn't had one for long."

"When did Marcia learn that this sort of thing was going on?"

"Since yesterday."

"I saw her last night, and she said nothing of it."

"Did she mention Carrie's name?" asked the stranger, rather anxiously.

"No."

"Then the matter must have slipped her mind. By the way, Carrie had her picture taken the other day. Have you seen it?"

"No."

"Here it is. Isn't she sweet?"

The young man with the black beard produced a cabinet photo of a very pretty young woman with a pronounced bang and an arch expression.

Tom Dalton's doubts, if he had any, vanished at the sight of the counterfeit presentment of his sweetheart's sister.

"She is a beauty and no mistake."

"She's a corker. Beats 'em all."

"Marcia excepted."

"Well, Marcia is another Carrie, so we won't count her. But here, Dalton, this won't do. I've overstaid my time. I will meet you at one o'clock at the northwest corner of Mount Morris square."

"All right. I'll be there."

"Good-by, then."

"So long."

The young man hastened away briskly, and Tom Dalton pursued his walk.

At one o'clock the two men met at the place appointed.

After a short conversation they proceeded in the direction of West One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street.

Stopping in front of a building devoted to flats upon which the sign "To Let" stared at them from a window on the first floor the young man said:

"This is the place."

"What floor?"

"The fourth."

"Sure it is not vacant like the first?"

"Sure—at least Miss Holley is sure."

"Let's go up, then."

It must be explained that the sub-patrolman was in citizen's clothes and that he had endeavored to disguise himself by shaving off the heavy mustache which for years had adorned his upper lip.

Nothing but the prospect of becoming a regular and earning a big reward could have induced him to sacrifice this much-loved hirsute appendage.

The young man with the black beard and keen black eyes led the way. The door was unlocked, and they entered the hall without knocking.

As they ascended the several flights of

stairs they met no one and saw nothing to indicate that any of the flats were occupied.

Arrived at the fourth story the guide pointed to a door and whispered:

"He's in there, I'll bet a hat."

"What makes you think so?"

"I heard a man's voice just as I reached the top of the stairs."

"What's best to be done?"

"Knock at the door, and if your man opens it nab him. If some one else responds to your summons ask to see Mr. Perkins. And if no one comes to the door open it and walk in; see?"

The sub-patrolman was not thick-witted, but he had never engaged upon a case on his own hook.

He didn't know the ropes, so to speak.

As the young man's advice was good, however, he took it.

He softly went up to the door and knocked.

No answer.

He knocked again and again without result.

"Better open the door and waltz in," suggested his mentor, and Dalton obeyed.

But he had no sooner turned the knob and made a motion to push the door open, than an unwelcome surprise greeted him.

Something heavy descended on his head, and the door flew open, and he plunged forward to strike the floor of the apartment and remain there.

It was some time before he opened his eyes in consciousness.

There was a dull pain at the back of his head, and he felt sore all over.

He had been sandbagged.

As he raised himself on an elbow and

looked about him he saw that the apartment was bare of furniture.

A sharp fear smote him as he recalled the incidents connected with his arrival there.

He felt in his pockets for his purse.

Gone.

Then he looked for his watch.

Gone also.

Tom Dalton arose to his feet and staggered to the door.

As he went down the stairs the air became blue by reason of the profanity which flowed in a steady stream from his lips.

Reaching the police station, he informed the captain that his career as an officer must cease.

Surprised at the honest fellow's determination the captain asked:

"What has happened?"

"Something personal; I can't tell you."

"What will you do?"

"I have the promise of a job in Morrisiana."

"To do what?"

"Say nothing and saw wood."

CHAPTER II.

BEGINNING OF AN INTERESTING GAME.

There was a deep frown on the strong, intelligent face of Chief Inspector Steers as he sat alone in his private office a few days after the events narrated in the opening chapter of this story.

The Harlem robberies had increased at an alarming rate.

The bold robber having worked one quarter had shifted his operations to another.

Over sixty victims had been reported within a week.

The amount carried off in money and valuables now exceeded twenty thousand dollars.

"The fellow must be the human embodiment of the Old Boy himself," muttered the inspector, "or he could never have succeeded so thoroughly in mystifying my detectives. If Nick Carter was disengaged I might have this vexed matter settled in short order. He was in Chicago the other day, and my telegram——"

"B-r-r-r-rig!" from the telephone interrupted his cogitations.

A message from Superintendent Byrnes.

"Do you want to see Carter?"

"Do I? I should say so."

"He's here."

"Where? In New York?"

"Yes. Strauss has just reported him to be in Harlem."

"What can he be doing there?"

"Don't know, but can guess. Shall I send for him?"

"At once."

"All right."

An hour later the great detective presented a smiling face before the chief inspector of the metropolitan police.

"Got in town this morning," Nick said, after the usual cordial greeting had been exchanged, "and having read in the morning papers of the Harlem robberies, I thought I would go out to test a certain theory that had suddenly taken root in my mind."

The inspector was all interest at once.

His eyes twinkled in satisfaction as Nick went on.

"It appeared to me," began the latter.

"that the very enterprising individual who has been raising Ned among the Harlem flats of late is an old acquaintance of mine."

"Ah!"

The inspector's ejaculation expressed as much pleasure as surprise.

"Do you remember," said Nick, "the very slick party who worked the flats of both New York and Brooklyn some six years ago?"

"Let me see. Yes. But that fellow was a kid—a printer, and not more than seventeen years old."

"The same," returned Nick, quietly. "Do you remember his name?"

"Daly, alias Wallace."

"That's the chap. Let's call him Wallace, for that's the cognomen he's known by."

"He worked with Brandt, the kitten, and was sent to the penitentiary for five years."

"And served four. Correct. Two years ago he went to Connecticut."

"I think I did hear that he went off somewhere and got work at his trade, that of a stone mason."

"Yes, and he labored just long enough to make the acquaintance of a very pretty girl, the only daughter of a respectable widow."

"You're well posted, Carter. Must have kept track of the youngster from his first start into crime."

"So I did. You see, I had something to do with his conviction six years ago, and he was such a sharp, wide-awake, intelligent fakir that I concluded it would be worth my while to keep track of his movements."

"I knew when he left prison, when he married, and when he returned to New York with his wife. Chick has had an eye on him lately,

and last week my assistant informed me that Wallace was up to some shady work, for he had been losing thousands of dollars at the races, and had no visible means of support.

"And this morning," concluded Nick, "I found on my arrival in Harlem that the youngster that was—the young man that is; he's twenty-three now, and so changed you'd never recognize him as the Brooklyn kid grown up—had been seen coming out of several flats at the times of the several robberies therein."

"So Jim Wallace is the thief?" commented the inspector.

"Beyond the shadow of a doubt."

"It is strange that none of my detectives could spot him."

"Not very strange when you consider that he has kept out of New York until very lately, that he has changed considerably since his discharge from prison, and that he is an adept in the matter of disguises."

"Carter," said the inspector, earnestly, "if you will land this rascal you will do me a personal favor as well as earn a rich reward."

"You see," he quickly added, as Nick was about to speak, "the operations of this fellow reflect on my management of the office. People come in every day and say, 'What's the matter with the detective force of New York? Is it possible that this rogue who is cutting such a wide swath in Harlem is more than a match for Superintendent Byrnes' successor and the skilled and intelligent force under his control?'"

"I'll land him, inspector," replied the great detective, with grim positiveness."

Nick remained in the office but a short time longer.

He had made an appointment with his assistants for that afternoon, and when he went to the place agreed upon he found Chick, Patsy and Miss Ida Jones awaiting him.

After greeting them pleasantly Nick, in his quick, abrupt manner, got down to business.

After a brief statement of Jim Wallace's misdeeds, etc., given for the benefit of Miss Jones, for Chick and Patsy were already well posted in regard to the doings of the bold and daring criminal, the great detective said to Chick:

"Any races at Coney Island to-day?"

"Yes; Futurity stakes, with Corrigan's colt as the sensational entry, at Brighton Beach."

"Good. Wallace will be there. Patsy, it will be your business to shadow him after Chick puts you onto him."

Patsy's eyes glistened with pleasure.

"He sha'n't fool me the way Danvers did."

"Now, Chick," said his superior, "your work will be to shadow Patsy."

"What!"

"Shadow Patsy."

"With what object?" queried Chick, in great wonderment.

"With the object of tracking Wallace to his rendezvous or home."

"But Patsy will do that, won't he?"

"He will do his best, and he will do all that I expect and require of him," returned Nick, quietly. "But he won't be able, in my judgment, to get the upper hand of our quarry in his role of shadower."

Patsy's bright face expressed both disappointment and curiosity.

As for Chick, who knew his superior better, he waited with an impassive countenance for Nick to make the proper explanations of his curious statement and proposition.

"Jim Wallace is a cunning scoundrel, Chick," said the great detective, "and ordinary methods to capture him will likely fail.

"If he's caught it will be by playing trick against trick, and outholding him."

"If I put a shadower on to him when he leaves the races he'll drop to the business sure."

"Sure."

"Therefore, if I let Patsy go alone on his track he'll lose the scent. No reflection on your ability is meant, Patsy," added Nick, as he turned to his second assistant, "for this rascal whom we want to down has been pursuing the avocation of an actor for many years, while you have only just begun. Besides he——"

"No need to make any further explanations, Mr. Carter," said Patsy, "for I quite understand you."

"Not quite, perhaps," rejoined Nick, with a curious smile.

"What do you mean?"

"This: That I want you to assist Wallace in getting onto you, and therefore to allow him to throw dust in your eyes, so to speak."

"To get away from me?"

"That's it."

"That's a queer go, isn't it?" looking at Nick, a little doubtfully.

"It isn't in the usual line of ordinary detective business, but it will do to try on Mr. James Wallace."

"I see your drift," remarked Chick.

"I thought you would."

"You want me to take up the direct shadowing of Wallace when Patsy leaves off."

"Yes; you will shadow Patsy until Wallace leaves him in the lurch; then you will get in and track the cunning youngster to his nest."

"Good," commented Chick, with enthusiasm. "He'll never spot me, for the idea of two shadows won't enter his head."

"That's the way I figure it," said Nick.

"All right, and after I've run him down——"

"Report to me here."

"Good. Come, Patsy, let's be off."

When the two assistants had gone Nick turned to Miss Jones, who had been a quiet and attentive listener to the foregoing.

"You want me to find Wallace's wife and gain her confidence, I presume?" she said, as she lifted her dark, serious eyes to the great detective's face.

"You have divined my wish exactly."

"And if I find the husband at home?"

"Report to me here at once, in the usual secret cipher, should I not be here in person."

"Can you give me any information regarding the lady?" Miss Jones asked.

"She is very smart and intelligent as well as handsome and stylish."

"And devotedly attached to her wicked husband, I presume?"

"Yes. She would go through fire and water to serve him."

"My undertaking promises to be a difficult one, then. All the better, for I like to engage in the struggle in which wit must be

pitted against wit, cunning against cunning."

"About Mrs. Daly, alias Wallace, what I have learned about her is this, Ida:

"She had never seen much money when she married Wallace, and the easy life that came to her afterward suited her notions to a dot, for she loves fine clothes and all the ways of luxury.

"When Jim took her to New York he told her that he intended to make a living by betting on the races.

"Some days he would come home with a pocketful of money, and throwing a handful of gold and silver and notes into her lap would tell her to go spend it.

"Other days he would borrow what money she had and go out to Coney Island and lose it.

"He was never known to win at the races, and all the money he has ever obtained has been by the exercise of his rare criminal gifts.

"Where she lives and where Jim holds out I can't tell you. If I could I would not need your assistance.

"But when you find it, as you will, I miss my guess if you don't strike a sort of palace fit for a king, filled with costly furniture, bric-a-brac, art treasures, and all the delinquencies of the season, as Wallace himself would say."

"I shall look for him on the east side," Miss Jones said.

"May I ask why?"

"Because he has been operating on the west side."

"You are probably right, and how shall you begin your investigation?"

"As an agent for a Chinese lottery."

She spoke calmly and in a matter-of-fact voice.

Nick looked at her a moment gravely.

Then a smile crept into his face.

"You purpose pursuing my methods," he said, "by working a little out of the ordinary."

"Yes."

"Good. The agent of a Chinese lottery—such an agent as you ought to make—will be able to gain more information, make better headway than a mere canvasser of books, or other traps, would."

"I shall act upon the presumption that she has become affected with the gaming fever."

"I see."

"As her husband is a gambler, as she loves money as well as she loves him, and as she readily and cheerfully spends the money he gives her, it follows that she must sympathize in his pursuits, be they off color or not."

"Miss Jones," said Nick, gracefully, "I am sure that your part of the programme will be admirably carried out."

"And now I will leave you with the conviction that the combined efforts of yourself, Chick, and Patsy will place Mr. James Wallace in a hole that he cannot escape from."

The great detective parted with his lady assistant, and then started for the Manhattan Beach ferry.

"My part in the little play," he said to himself, "will be to shadow not Wallace or Patsy, but Chick."

When the races were over at Brighton Beach that afternoon a green-looking countryman, "of the spring crop, Queens County," as a Brooklynite remarked when he had swept his person with a sarcastic eye, might have been seen gazing with wide-open mouth at the performance of a knife thrower

—a Bowery juggler, who had a little stand not far from the track.

Another spectator standing by the countryman's side was a typical metropolitan tough, whose sneering smile at the juggler's performances so aggravated that personage that at last he wrathfully exclaimed:

"See here, young feller, maybe you kin beat me at this game, eh?"

"Dat's w'at, sister."

"W'at ! You really t'ink so?"

"Don't t'ink so. Know so."

The tough had the stump of a cigar in his mouth, which he now placed at an angle of forty-five degrees.

"Oh, go off 'n' take a bat'."

"W'at yer say?" fiercely.

"Take a bat', dat is, cully, take a tum'le; see?"

"I see dat yer tryin' ter backcap me. But yer can't, Reuben, not ter-day. I'm loaded fer fakirs, an' w'en I gits a dead sight on yer I'm goin' ter let 'er flicker."

"W'at are you givin' me? Cranberries?"

"Naw. It'll be soup w'en I takes dem knives and has a try wid 'em."

"Take 'em den."

The juggler handed the knives to the tough, who after casting a furtive glance behind him, jumped over the rope that separated the outfit from the crowd and prepared to exhibit his powers as a knife thrower.

The countryman followed the tough's backward glance, and saw a tall, well-dressed, handsome young man with a black mustache, brilliant black eyes, and a pale face, who seemed to be very much interested in the tough's performance.

Not far from this individual was a haggard visaged bootblack, whose walk showed a decided limp.

The tough raised one of the knives, and with a quick, "Here she goes," flung it with a practiced hand.

It struck the blackboard target, and rang the bell.

Five times this success was repeated.

Then the tough, who was now the hero of the crowd, began a series of juggling operations that made the countryman cry out in delight:

"Jehoshophat an' Jiminy Christmas, but ain't he a Jim Dandy!"

The young man with the black eyes also gave vent to his admiration.

"Never saw the like of it in my life."

"Yer never did, eh?" sneered the proprietor of the outfit, whose nose had been put out of joint, as it were, when the tough began his performance. "Well, I'll bet a fiver that I can knock ther spots off'n w'at he's doin' now."

"That's not the kind of a bet I want to make," returned the young man, "but this would suit me. I'll go you a twenty he can beat you as an all-around knife thrower and juggler."

"I'll go yer."

The fakir was excited and angry.

Besides, his reputation was at stake.

The tough listened to the above discussion with a smile.

The money was put up, and the countryman was selected as stakeholder.

It was close upon dusk when the contest began, and it was still going on with the odds in favor of the tough, when it became so dark that operations had to cease.

"Postponed until to-morrow," announced the black-eyed bettor. "That's agreeable?"

"Suits me, cully," said the tough, nonchalantly.

"I ain't er kickin'," grunted the juggler.

"But how about the boodle?"

"Guess ye'd better take it back," remarked the stakeholder; "and if I'm here to-morrer you kin plank it up agin. How's that, hey?"

"All right," responded the two bettors.

After the money had been returned the black-eyed young man called the tough aside.

"I'd like to have a few words with you in private," he said, earnestly.

"Anythin' in it?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm yer gooseberry."

They walked up the road a way, and leaned against a fence.

"Have a cigar," said the young man.

"Don't care if I do."

The tough took the proffered weed, and began to puff it vigorously.

As the twain began talking the pale-faced bootblack strolled past.

It was not so dark, but he could see their forms plainly.

After going on a short distance the bootblack crouched behind a mound of sand and waited.

His action had not been observed by the two men at the fence.

But a certain individual had taken note of the bootblack's movements.

That individual was the countryman.

And now began a most peculiar and interesting game in which one man was pitted against three.

For the young man of the black eyes was Jim Wallace, the daring flat robber.

His companion, the tough, was Chick, while the bootblack was Patsy.

And who was the countryman?

Nick Carter.

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTIFIED DETECTIVE.

"I've got a girl over in Brooklyn," said Wallace to Chick, "that I've been visiting on the quiet for some time. See?"

"I ain't blind."

"This girl is engaged to be married to a rich stock broker in New York."

"If she is waitin' fer my consent, give it to

her, young feller, wid my bes' respects. See?"

"I'll do it."

"T'anks."

"Don't mention it. Now, this broker," went on Wallace, in his former serious tone, "is as jealous as he can be."

"And he suspects that she has been receiving outside attentions."

"In fact, suspecting me, he has hired a certain party to pipe off my movements."

"An' yer want me ter smash der bloke, is dat it?"

"No, I want you to smash the fellow he has hired to watch me."

Chick jerked his head forward, crooked his elbow in a pugilistic manner, and spat viciously at the fence.

"Gimme dat twenny yer put up a wi'le ago, an' I'll make him a candymate for der horse-pistol."

"I knew by the cut of your jib that you were the man I was looking for," said Wallace, approvingly.

"Now, yer've foun' me, wair's der bloke I'm ter smash?"

"About here somewhere."

"Pipin' yer?"

"Yes."

"Describe him."

"He's made up as a bootblack."

"Wot! dat snoozer wid er ghos' mug onter him?"

"The same."

"He ain't no spy."

"What makes you think so?"

"He ain't got sense 'nuff ter las' him over night."

"Don't you fool yourself. By the way, by what name shall I address you?"

"Tommy der Pug."

"Well, then, Tommy der Pug, you want to understand that this bootblack is sharper than a ferret."

"Who tole yer?"

"I know him by reputation?"

"All right. Sharp goes. Now, wair am I ter do him up?"

"Not kill him, smash him, break his jaw, lay him up so he can't interfere with other's people's business for a week at least."

"I'll fix him, bet yer pants!"

"Good! Now, here is the programme."

Wallace bent forward, and whispered these words into the pseudo-tough's ear:

"When I start for the railway station this bootblack will be found somewhere in my rear. Keep your eye on him, and after we get to Brooklyn and have left the train light down on him."

"Down by der ferry, eh?"

"Yes, that's a good place."

"Will you'se be around ter se der fun?"

"No, I won't have time. Important business over the river. See?"

"How about der blunt?"

"I'll pay you twenty down, and thirty when the job is done."

"W'en der job's done you'se 'll be in New York. Dat won't wash, Reuben."

"It will have to. You can call on me at this address."

Wallace gave Chick the card of a Bowery saloon.

Nick Carter's assistant took it, thought a moment, and then said:

"I'll trus' yer dis time. Gimme der twenny."

The money was placed in his hands.

Soon after they separated.

As Jim Wallace wended his way to the railway station, he chuckled softly to himself.

His thought were pleasant ones.

"Steers has got onto me," so they ran, "and has put a detective on my track."

"The inspector knows that suspicions of a man won't convict him, and what he wants, now that he has got his eye on me, is to track me to the place where I have stored my plun-

der, as well as to have my next operation in the flat line witnessed by a party whose evidence in court will be worth something," and he was right. The rascal had not toyed with justice for years without becoming thoroughly familiar with the machinery of police officers and courts, and of understanding what was legal evidence and what was not.

He had caught Patsy looking at him queerly several times at the races, and being on his guard, and also blessed with a quick intuition, he had at once put down the young detective as an emissary of Chief Inspector Steers.

Had he known that Nick Carter was in New York, he would, perhaps, have associated the false bootblack with some cunning plan of the Little Giant.

But Wallace supposed Nick to be in the West.

In fact, all his Harlem operations had been committed during Nick's absence.

"If I queer the game of this spy of Steers," mused the young criminal, as he was being whirled over the railway toward Brooklyn, "I'll clean up in Harlem to-morrow, and then transfer my operations to Brooklyn or Jersey City."

He saw the countryman board the train, but paid no attention to him.

At the ferry, Wallace looked around for the bootblack.

To his surprise, he saw him struggling in the grasp of the false tough in the full glare of the electric light.

Chick turned a meaning glance in his employer's direction at this moment, and while he held Patsy with one hand, with the other he threw open his coat and exhibited an officer's badge, either that of a policeman or a detective.

"What the duse does this mean?" muttered the villain, under his breath. "I don't understand it."

He saw the tough drag the lame bootblack away, and then his brow cleared.

As the boat pushed off, he went whistling softly and in a very easy frame of mind.

"That tough is a daisy," his thoughts now ran, "and the copper racket was the slickest and softest one to play."

"Of course, he'll start for the police station with his prisoner, and on the way he will find it necessary—in some dark and obscure corner, of course—to beat his prisoner to a jelly for resisting arrest."

"I must cultivate the acquaintance of this new employee of mine. It's not every day a fellow meets with such a handy, intelligent worker."

On the boat was the countryman.

The great detective had taken a hand in the game at the start, for the reason that he feared that his carefully arranged programme might either miscarry or require attention on some material point.

He conjectured that Chick had not allowed Wallace to leave his sight without an appointment with the slick rascal; but there existed a doubt in Nick's mind as to whether Wallace would keep the appointment or not.

"If he has been taken by Chick's ways, and has not the least suspicion of his identity, then he will meet my assistant as agreed upon. But in the meantime I must not lose sight of him, so that if Chick——"

Nick ceased to commune with himself, for a raw-looking Teuton suddenly accosted him.

"Oxcoose me," he said, timidly; "but I vas not lif py Ni Yorrik alretty."

"Dew tell!"

"So! I vas some strangers mit dose zitty."

"Well, what can I dew for ye, eh?"

"Maype dot you can dell where dot est ein Hoonderd und Swansy-feerst streed vas?"

"In Harlem, 'cordin' tew my recollection, mister."

"Vere dey haf dose flats alretty?"

Nick started, and gave the Dutchman the benefit of a searching scrutiny.

What did he mean by reference to Harlem flats?

"Yes," he said, slowly and guardedly, "I hearn tell that there's jest slathers of houses over theer with those Frenchy flats inter 'em."

"Und vere dey vas flats dey might be sharps, eh?"

The Dutchman smiled, as he asked this peculiar question.

"Look here!" said Nick, half angrily, "what air yew drivin' at? If it's some of your goldarned funny business, I don't want any of it in mine."

The Dutchman allowed a low, aggravating chuckle to escape him.

"If I can fool you, Nick," he said, in the voice of Chick, "then I won't have much difficulty in getting away with Jim Wallace."

The great detective silently shook hands with his assistant.

"If you come on as fast as this, my boy," he whispered, "I'll have to look to my laurels."

They withdrew to a quiet spot out of sight of their quarry, and sat down.

"I had a fine chance to do a little lightning change business," said Chick, in explanation, "and I did it."

"When I had yanked Patsy out of sight behind a pile of boxes, I transformed myself into a Dutchman in three shakes of a lamb's tail."

"The boat was getting ready to shove off when I leaped on board. I hadn't a second to spare."

"Where's Patsy?" asked Nick.

"In Brooklyn. He'll come over on the next boat."

When the passengers landed in New York, Nick parted with Chick, leaving to Young Hercules the task of shadowing Wallace, while he himself hastened to the rendezvous

to see if any message had been left there by Miss Ida Jones.

The great detective hardly expected to hear from her so soon, and he was deeply gratified when these words, translated from the cipher, met his eyes:

"I believe I have made a most important discovery. Come at once to No. — Bowery.

"L. J."

The place designated was an underground saloon frequented by thieves and toughs, and presided over by a one-eyed Irishman of the name of Red Mike Sheedy.

Nick wondered in his mind what clew had brought his lady assistant to such a disreputable and dangerous quarter, but remembering the brave and daring work she had done in the green-goods case, he concluded that she had made a bold stroke in male attire, in order that she might not lose a single trick in the game she was playing.

Arrived at the saloon about nine, Nick, in the character of a swell crook, entered the dingy, ill-smelling and ill-lighted place, and distinguishing the proprietor's face through a rift in the cloud of tobacco-smoke that enveloped him, gave a smart rap on the greasy counter, and called for beer.

While Red Mike waited on him, Nick cast his eyes about the room.

Two tables were occupied by card players, and in a corner sat a young man with a red-and-white complexion and a small, black mustache.

When Nick had finished his glass, the young man secretly beckoned to him.

In the belief that he was about to meet Miss Jones in disguise, the detective went over to where the young man sat.

As he came nearer he saw to his surprise, that the person who had beckoned to him, though a woman in disguise, was not Miss Ida Jones.

"The lady you are looking for is in there,"

said the disguised one, in a sweet contralto, indicating a rear room.

"How do you know that I am looking for a lady?" inquired Nick, in his assumed character as the crook.

"She told me you were coming," was the composed reply.

"She? Who?"

"Miss Ida Jones."

"Told you I was coming?" interrogated Nick, in affected wonder. "Haven't you made a mistake?"

If a trick was being attempted, he did not purpose being taken off his guard.

"No."

"This is a queer go," he muttered, as if to himself. "A Miss Ida Jones tells you I am coming to this shebang?"

"That's what I said, Mr. Carter," said the disguised woman, coolly.

Nick started.

Then he looked her over slowly.

The calm, steady eyes and the motionless countenance gave him no clew.

"How did Miss Jones know that I was coming here in this get up?" he asked.

"She did not specify the disguise you would assume. She simply told me to be on the lookout for Nick Carter, who might be identified by a piece of court-plaster over his left eye."

The detective flushed to the temples with vexation.

He had received a slight cut over the eye several days before while making an arrest in Chicago, and since his arrival in New York he had worn a piece of plaster over the wound.

That Ida Jones should have noticed it did not surprise him; but he was annoyed to think that she should have confided the secret of the plaster to another party to be used as a means of identification.

Stop! Had she done so?

He had only this woman's word for it—a woman masquerading in male attire, who might be, for all he knew to the contrary, an emissary and tool of Jim Wallace.

He would soon know whether he was being deceived or not.

"You say Miss Jones told you to look out for me?"

"Yes."

"Why could she not look out for me herself?"

"Because she has business in there," pointing toward the door of a room in the rear.

"She is in there now, is she?"

"Yes."

"Will you go in and inform her that I wish to see her?"

"No, I cannot."

"Why?"

"Because to do so would be to spoil her plans."

"Do you know what they are?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, if you please."

"To trace the plunder stolen from the Harlem flats and fix the crime on James Wallace."

"She told you this?" Nick said, scornfully. "Excuse me, my dear, but that doesn't go down."

"You would have confided in me had you been in her place," returned the disguised woman, earnestly.

"I would, would I? Humph!"

"Of course you would."

"Will you be kind enough to explain? Why would I?"

"Because you could not refuse to confide in one who is as anxious as you are to see James Wallace the inmate of the hotel at Sing Sing."

"You are referring to yourself, I presume?"

"I am."

"And pray who may you be?"

"I am the wife of the man you are seeking to corner."

"The wife of James Wallace?"

"Yes."

Nick Carter whistled.

Unbelief looked out of his eyes.

"Perhaps you doubt my word," she said, reproachfully.

"Madam," said the great detective, coldly, "in my profession I am compelled to doubt until presented with the facts. Permit me to remind you that James Wallace and his wife are a most affectionate couple; that she knows of his evil courses and approves of them because they bring in money; and money to her means luxury—the gratification of every selfish whim and pleasure."

"She did love him once."

"And does not now?" sneered Nick.

"She loves him no more," responded the woman, sadly.

"What has he done to forfeit her love?"

"He has terribly wronged her."

"In what way?"

"By making her believe him to be her husband when, in fact, he has a wife living—a woman he married a week after he got out of prison and nearly two years before he saw me."

"This is a very pretty story," said Nick, with an amused smile; "so pretty that if you were to send it to one of the Sunday papers it might be worked up into something very taking in print."

The woman's black eyes flashed in anger.

"You will regret those contemptuous words" she said, "when you find out how you have misjudged me. Miss Ida Jones will bring you to your senses."

"Ah, yes, Miss Jones! For the moment I had forgotten her."

"She told me about Jim's duplicity."

"She did, eh?"

"Yes. I never dreamed until this after-

noon that he had a wife living when he married me."

"Miss Jones met you—where?"

"At my house. On East Fifty-seventh street."

"In what guise did she accost you? As a woman or as a man?"

"As a woman."

"She had some excuse for calling upon you; what was it?"

"She wanted to sell me a ticket for a Chinese lottery."

"Did she know who you were?"

"Not at first."

"How did she make the discovery that you were the wife of Jim Wallace?"

"I invited her into the parlor, and when she entered she noticed a piece of statuary—a Clytie—that I had been foolish enough to put on the mantel. It had been stolen by Jim from a Harlem flat the day before."

"And she identified it?"

"At once."

"Well, what occurred when she denounced you?"

"She did not denounce me."

"No? What words did she use then?"

"She said very quietly, and like the lady she is, 'Mrs. Wallace,' said she, 'I am very sorry for you.'

"'What for?' said I, with a toss of my head, for I was defiant, and I had my husband's interests at heart at that moment I can tell you.

"'For the gross deception to which you have been the victim,' was her reply.

"And then she told me all about Jim's other wife—his true wife.

"I wouldn't believe her at first, but when she brought her proofs, a copy of the marriage certificate, taken from the register, and then went out and brought in the woman herself—she had been waiting down the

street—I could not but believe that I had been most shamefully imposed upon.

“All my love for Jim Wallace then turned to hate, and when Ida Jones proposed that I assist her in bringing him to justice for the Harlem robberies, I eagerly and fiercely consented.

“The first proposition made by your assistant, Mr. Carter,” the disguised woman went on, “was that I should turn up the stolen plunder—that is, as much of it as Jim had secreted about the house.

“This I agreed to do, and when I had done so, Miss Jones had it all loaded into a police wagon, which she had telephoned for, and it was taken to police headquarters.”

“At this point in the woman’s recital, Nick became firmly convinced that an attempt was being made to hoodwink him.

He had been listening to the artful tale of a skilled romancer.

What was her object?

To lure him into some pitfall, of course.

He determined to put a stop to her little game at once.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, abruptly, when she paused for a moment; “but I must speak to Miss Jones for a moment.”

The answer surprised him greatly.

“Very well,” said the disguised woman, “she’s in there, and is probably awaiting you.”

Nick had made up his mind as a natural sequence to his theory of his companion’s character that Ida Jones was not in the next apartment, nor anywhere in the vicinity.

But when the woman in male attire spoke so coolly in reference to the lady detective’s presence in the building, Nick took two quick steps and reached the door opening into the rear room.

He turned the knob quickly, and opened the door.

A small apartment with a circular table in the center and a lamp upon it.

Sitting by the table was a woman in the guise of a Bowery boy.

It was Miss Ida Jones.

Nick was about to speak, when she put her finger to her lips and motioned him back.

The great detective nodded his head, and silently closed the door.

Then he turned to the woman he had left in the corner.

She was regarding him with a curious smile.

“Well?” was her sarcastic query. “What do you think, now?”

Nick answered, evasively.

“I think it will rain before morning.”

CHAPTER IV.

NICK FALLS INTO A TRAP.

Nick Carter was puzzled when he turned from the room which held Miss Ida Jones, his lady assistant, and confronted the disguised woman who represented herself to be the wife of James Wallace.

The story she had told, backed by the presence of Miss Jones in the saloon, would have been proof positive to the ordinary detective that she had told the truth.

But Nick Carter was not an ordinary detective.

As a deep student of human nature, and one whose strange and varied experience had brought him in contact with all sorts and conditions of men, and with crime and wickedness in all its phases, he was not prepared to swallow at a gulp the very plausible yarn the disguised woman had reeled off.

It was a pretty yarn, a very pretty one, indeed.

It had been cleverly put together, but it lacked in but one important essential.

And that essential was a proper under-

standing of the character and ability of Nick's lady assistant.

The great detective could believe that Miss Jones might have confided in Jim Wallace's wife under the circumstances as narrated by her, or the person who was personating her; he could believe that she had asked Mrs. Wallace to turn up the stolen property.

But he could not believe that his assistant would take it upon herself to send the plant to police headquarters.

Such a proceeding was contrary to good sense.

It might spoil everything, for Jim Wallace might get word of the removal of the plunder in time to keep out of harm's way.

No good detective or officer of the law would think of taking such an action while a fine chance existed for the immediate capture of the robber.

It was only in a case of public raid, or when the unlawful operators were unknown, or, scenting danger, had fled the scene of their crimes; or that arrest had immediately followed or preceded the movement, that stolen property had been taken from its place of concealment to police headquarters.

Miss Ida Jones understood her business thoroughly—on that point Nick was convinced—and besides she had not departed on her mission without having received definite instructions as to the course she should pursue.

It was no part of her duty to take upon herself any of the functions that naturally devolved upon her superior.

The woman who was, or pretended to be, Jim Wallace's wife, was therefore, according to the great detective's shrewd deductions, a fabricator in this one point at least.

And if she spoke falsely in one regard, might not her whole story be a tissue of ingenious lies?

Or were both truth and falsehood blended

in her narrative the better to deceive him?

After regarding her unabashed countenance for a moment, Nick said:

"What business is occupying Miss Jones in the next room?"

"She is waiting for the appearance of Jim Wallace."

"What!"

"It surprises you, does it?"

"It does, madam."

"And yet I speak the truth."

"Jim Wallace is too sharp and crafty to put his neck in a noose of this kind."

"The sharpest rogue has his weak spot."

"And has my assistant found that weak spot?"

"She has."

"And what is it?"

"Woman."

"I thought you would say so, and, what's more, it's the truth."

"Of course it is."

But she looked at the great detective with eyes of suspicion when he so readily coincided with her.

"Yes," said Nick, with decision, "he's weak on the woman question. But my assistant—how did she make use of her knowledge of his weak point?"

"At her request I indited a note to him, and had it sent off by a boy whom I knew could be trusted."

"You know where Jim hangs out when he's not at home, then?"

"Certainly."

"Go on."

"The note alluded to a chance meeting at the races."

"Jim is too fly to be caught by such a bait as that."

"Oh, no, for the meeting actually took place! One of the most beautiful women in New York—she moves in a select but fast set—met Jim at Brighton Beach, the

other day, and made eyes at him till he actually blushed. Both were on the mash, and she outmashed him."

"He told you this, did he?"

"Yes, and laughed at the episode, for he never expected to see her again?"

"Well?"

"Now, this note of mine—inspired by Miss Jones—referred to this meeting—of eyes—and asked for a different kind of a meeting. In fact, an appointment was made for Red Mike's saloon this very evening."

A queer smile curled about the corners of Nick's mouth.

"Is not this a rather inappropriate quarter for a lady of the best society to select as a trysting-place?"

"No."

"Explain."

"She's got the slumming craze like many others of her kind. I refer to this pet aversion of hers in the note, and say that I—that is she, you understand—have been here before."

"I see."

"And that to-night I will come in disguise—in male attire."

"What! Do you intend to personate the society belle on this occasion?"

"How stupid you are!"

Nick smiled inwardly.

"Miss Ida Jones is to take the part of Jim's admirer," she explained.

The great detective began to entertain a feeling of respect for the disguised woman.

Such an expert romancer he had not encountered for many a day.

Some parts of her narrative bewildered him by its cunning plausibility.

It was certain that Miss Jones had an appointment of some kind in the next room.

If he could only see her for a moment—speak but a few words to her.

A rap on the door made him start.

"She wants me," said the disguised woman, quickly.

"Perhaps not. It may be that I am the person she desires."

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

Nick reached the door just as another rap came.

He entered to find the room empty.

He determined to sit down and wait for her return.

The room had two doors, one opening into the barroom, the other into another apartment or a corridor, the detective knew not which.

Five minutes passed.

Then the door by which he had entered opened quickly.

Nick turned to see the face and person of the woman in disguise, who had represented herself to be Jim Wallace's wife.

At the same moment the other door opened and a man leaped into the room.

He threw himself upon Nick before the latter had time to defend himself.

A short, sharp and decisive struggle followed.

But the detective was outnumbered.

For while he was wrestling with his powerful adversary, a club, wielded by the disguised woman, descended again and again on Nick's devoted head, until he fell limp and insensible to the floor.

CHAPTER V.

MISS JONES' MISADVENTURE.

The great detective had fallen into a trap most cleverly prepared by the friends of Jim Wallace.

And Miss Ida Jones was also a victim.

She had set out on her mission in the confident belief that success would crown her efforts; for before Nick Carter had entered upon the case she had learned that Wallace was a bigamist.

When the detail was given her, she resolved to keep the knowledge she had gained to herself until after she had put it to good advantage.

As the fact that Jim Wallace had committed bigamy would not be of importance in any other branch of the case than the one upon which she had entered, she did not think any harm could result from temporarily withholding it.

She regretted her mistake when too late to rectify it.

Miss Jones' washerwoman, a young, faded-out woman, had informed her that Jim Wallace had a wife living when he married the Connecticut girl.

The washerwoman was Mrs. Wallace No. 1.

Unfortunately the latter had a failing that had more than once brought her to grief.

She loved to tipple.

Whisky had once sent her to Blackwell's Island.

When Miss Jones left Nick she went straightway to Mrs. Wallace's poor habitation near the Grand Central Depot for the purpose of ascertaining if the woman had heard of her husband lately.

She found Mrs. Wallace in a happy mood.

In her little cheerless room she sat singing to herself, with a bottle of whisky on the table beside her.

Miss Jones frowned when she noticed the woman's condition, but she had no time for remonstrances.

Her business was urgent, and she could lecture the robber's deserted wife at some other time.

"Have you heard from your husband, lately?" Nick's lady assistant asked, after a few commonplaces had passed.

"Heard from him, is it? No. I haven't heard from the wretch, bad luck to him, but I've seen him."

"Seen him! Where?"

Here was news which might prove of a most important character.

"Coming out of a house on East Fifty-seventh street."

"Did you speak to him?"

"Not I. He's welcome to his other woman. I'm glad to be rid of him, the deceiver."

"The other woman?"

"Yes. A young woman bid him good-by at the door."

"Then he must live at the house you saw him come out of?"

"Of course he does, and some day I'll go up there and tear that hussy's eyes out."

"I thought you said just now that your husband was welcome to her."

With a maudlin grin, the woman replied:

"You didn't understand me. He's welcome to her, but she's not welcome to him."

"You make a curious distinction."

"That's all right."

Mrs. Wallace looked fondly at the half-empty bottle.

Nick Carter's lady assistant with a little gesture of disgust took her leave.

She had not been gone a minute before a young man entered.

He was well dressed, smooth-faced and sharp-eyed, with a hawk nose and thin, cruel lips.

At one time he acted as her husband's agent, and had paid her certain sums of money on condition that she should not seek him out or bother him.

Mrs. Wallace was in the act of finishing the bottle of whisky, when she heard the door open.

"You're a hog, Lena!" the man said, roughly.

"What is that you say, Matt Cooley?" she fiercely rejoined.

"You're a hog!"

"You're a liar!"

"No one but a hog would drink the last drop of liquor in a bottle when she saw an old friend coming in."

"I didn't see you, and you're not not an ol' frien', Matt Cooley!"

"If I bring the stuff, I'm a friend, ain't I?"

"Ye-es."

"Stuff buys whisky, you know."

"Right you are, Matty."

The liquor had now complete possession of her head, and her moral principles were floating away in the fumes that came forth with each breath that she exhaled.

"What was Ida Jones doing in here?" he asked in an insinuating tone, after he had laid a ten-dollar note in her lap.

"Who's Ida Jones?"

"The woman who just left here."

"How'd you come to know her?"

"I used to know her Cousin Rita, and I saw Ida when she was doing her first work for Nick Carter on the Henderson case."

"Were you Rita's friend?"

"No, I was an honest man then."

"Honest because it was policy to be so," the woman grunted.

"Maybe."

"Got any more gol' pieces?"

"Lots of 'em."

"You asked me a quesh'n jus' now," she said, with a cunning leer.

"I did."

"You want to know why Miss Ida Jones came here to see me."

"Correct."

"Gimme 'nother tenner 'n I'll tell you."

Matt Cooley put another bank-note into her hand.

Mrs. Wallace chuckled softly to herself as she stowed it away in her bosom.

"She came here to pump me."

"Eh?"

"To pump me 'bout Jim."

"Aha! I thought so. Well?"

"I told her I saw Jim this morn'. See?"

Her tongue was becoming thicker, and she rubbed her chin nervously as she spoke.

"Where did you tell her you saw him?"

"On Eas' Fif-seven' street."

"What!"

"On Eas' Fif-seven' street, 'n that's truth, Matt Cooley."

"Then she's gone there, now?"

"Of course she has. Tha's her reg'lar business."

Matt Cooley left the place unceremoniously.

There was an anxious look on his evil face as he took his way to the east side.

He was Jim Wallace's partner, and had located most of the flats which Jim had afterward plundered.

Cooley lived on East Fifty-seventh street, and Mrs. Wallace had seen her husband come out of his (Cooley's) house.

If Ida Jones went there she must make a discovery that would render his further stay in New York a most dangerous proceeding.

For a portion of the property stolen from the Harlem flats was in his house.

It consisted of articles of adornment which Mrs. Cooley had fancied.

This latter personage was a young woman of bright intelligence turned in an evil direction.

She was an able ally of her husband in all his criminal undertakings.

Before Matt Cooley met Wallace she had been his sole partner in all his schemes of robbery, and so cunningly had she played her part that she had never once come under police suspicion or surveillance.

Nick Carter had heard that Matt Cooley had a wife, but he had never met her.

"If I can only reach home before that female spy reaches there," muttered Matt, as he got into a cab, "Molly and I will be able to

fix things so as to queer her game in great shape."

His hand trembled as he opened the door of his dwelling, and his face was pale with apprehension.

But his heart gave a bound of relief, and he breathed freely when his wife met him with a smile, and in reply to his hurried question, said that no one had called during his absence.

When he told her what he had learned at Mrs. Wallace's, she pursed her pretty lips and bent her dark eyes to the floor.

"I have it, Matt," she said, presently.

"A plan to beat Nick Carter's game?"

"Yes."

"And save Jim Wallace as well?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I'll put that Clytie that Jim picked up in Harlem yesterday on the parlor mantel."

"That's a risky move."

"Wait and let me finish. Then I'll make Miss Ida Jones believe that I am young Mrs. Wallace—Jim's wife No. 2. See?"

"I see you've got some bold scheme in your head"—looking at her admiring eyes.

"So I have."

"Well, what next, Molly?"

"Miss Jones will do the sympathy act, I'm sure, and ten to one she'll tell me about Jim's first marriage."

"A hundred to one she will. It'll be the boss card to play."

"When she does, I'll pretend at first to be all broke up; and, after I've worked the briny in good style, I'll flash out as a wronged woman, who burns to be revenged on the vile brute who has so cruelly deceived me."

"I'll bet you'll fool her a big bunch, Molly."

"After that I'll play into her hands up to the limit of making an appointment to deliver Jim Wallace into her hands—that is, Nick Carter's."

"What place will you designate?"

"Red Mike's."

"How will you work the snap?"

"Leave that to me. Once I've got her there, I expect you and Jim to whirl in and put the finishing touches on the game."

"I understand. You press the button, and we'll do the rest."

It is unnecessary to follow the conversation of this wicked couple further.

Suffice it to say that when Nick Carter's lady assistant rang the bell at the front door, the details of the conspiracy had been fully arranged.

Ida Jones was a shrewd, sharp woman, but on this occasion she was completely taken in by the matchless acting of Matt Cooley's wife.

In the firm belief that she had found Jim Wallace's wife No. 2—the girl he had married in Connecticut—and that she had enlisted her services in the campaign against her husband—now shown up to her in the light of a base deceiver—Ida Jones left the house to don a male disguise, and hasten to Red Mike's saloon where she expected to meet Jim Wallace.

Before leaving for the saloon, she indited a note, in cipher, to Nick Carter.

When she reached Red Mike's, Mrs. Cooley, also in male disguise, was found awaiting her.

"Go into the back room," said the tricky Molly, "and wait till Jim comes. He will enter by the back way."

Informed that the part she had to play was that of the society belle who had fallen in love with Jim Wallace at the races, Ida Jones went into the back room, and closed the door.

A few moments after she had seated herself by the table, Mrs. Cooley entered.

"Did you see Nick Carter before you came here?" she asked, with assumed anxiety.

"No, but I left a message for him."

"Did you give him any instructions as to what he should do when he reached the saloon?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because he knows how to adapt himself to circumstances. Besides, I may see him."

"Not when he enters."

"You may inform him that I am in the room, if you like."

"Give me his description, and I will do so."

"I can't."

"He will come in disguise, then?"

"Of course."

"I will try to penetrate it."

"I wish you luck in the venture."

As Mrs. Cooley turned to go, she gave this instruction:

"No one must enter this room before Jim Wallace arrives, for if he should come suddenly to the other door and find somebody with you he would suspect a trap and take himself off."

"I will allow no one to enter."

"With a smile of satisfaction, the disguised woman-plotter went out of the room.

She met Nick Carter soon afterward, and partially mystified him by her ingenious story.

Ida Jones felt that all was well when he first opened the door of the back room, and looked in upon her, but acting upon the instructions of the woman she believed to be Mrs. Wallace No. 2, she waved him back and so Nick did not get a chance to speak to her.

Shortly after his return to the bar-room, the rear door opened quickly.

Miss Jones looked up expectantly.

"But it was not Jim Wallace who entered.

It was a man the lady detective had never seen before.

"Pardon me," he said, deferentially, "for this intrusion, but I come as the friend and messenger of the gentleman whom you are expecting."

"Where is he?" asked Miss Jones, in a tone of acute disappointment.

"Outside in the corridor. He is afraid to come in."

"Afraid?" her lips curled scornfully. "Afraid of what?"

"Not for himself," said the stranger, quickly; "but for your sake. The police are going to make a raid on this place to-night, and——"

"I see," said Nick's lady assistant, quickly, "and——"

"He wishes to save your reputation."

"I am obliged for his consideration."

"He is not a bad fellow when you get to know him."

Miss Jones found herself in a quandary.

She could not notify Nick of the slight change in her programme, and it was too early to give the signal that should bring him to her.

She must go out into the corridor and meet Wallace, or else give up all hope of seeing him that night.

As for the statement that a police raid was contemplated, it might or might not be true.

The fact was patent, however, that Jim Wallace was not disposed to trust himself in the back room.

Just a faint suspicion of treachery crept into her mind, as she rose to follow the stranger—who was none other than Matt Cooley—into the corridor, and for a moment she hesitated.

But the thought of the chance that might be forever lost in case her suspicions proved to be groundless, made her go forward resolutely.

She stepped out of the room into almost black darkness.

The next instant she knew what a terrible mistake she had made.

A rude hand was pressed tightly over her mouth, and she was thrown roughly to the damp flags of a long, narrow cellar, and not a corridor.

"Keep quiet and stop your kicking," hissed a hoarse voice into her ear, "or I'll choke the life out of you."

The speaker was Jim Wallace.

CHAPTER VI.

CAUGHT A TARTAR.

When Nick Carter's senses returned, he found himself lying on his back in some dark, damp hole.

His head pained him, and he involuntarily uttered a groan, as he attempted to move it.

The groan was productive of one result, which might be a beneficial one.

It assured him of companionship.

He was not alone in his dark, gloomy prison.

"Who's there?" came a faint voice, close at hand.

Nick answered quickly:

"A fellow victim, I presume."

The detective's voice sounded harsh and unnatural.

He hardly recognized it himself.

"Who are you?" again queried the voice, this time louder and clearer.

"Nick Carter," was the surprised response.
 "And what brings you here, Miss Jones?"

The lady assistant heaved a profound sigh.

"My want of caution."

"We are none of us perfect."

"No need to tell me that."

"Are you bound like me?"

"Yes. I can't move, I am not only bound, but secured to a staple in the floor."

"My fix. How long have you been in here?"

"I don't know. I fainted when I got here, and I think it was your voice which brought me to consciousness."

"The time must be short, then. Have you any idea where we are?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In a cellar back of Red Mike's saloon."

Miss Jones then told Nick what had happened since he had parted with her in the afternoon at the rendezvous.

"Tricked and trapped by as cunning a trio of scoundrels as ever I had professional business with," was his bitter comment.

"Jim Wallace is one," Miss Jones said.
 "Who are the others?"

"The woman who represented herself to be his second wife, and one Matt Cooley."

"Who is the woman?"

"Matt Cooley's wife."

"How did you make this discovery?"

"By putting two and two together; I was surprised by Matt in the room where I expected to find you. Then the thought instantly flashed into my mind that the woman in the bar-room was his wife, whom I had heard much about, but had never seen."

"She is the smartest woman in the criminal line that I ever met," rejoined Miss Jones.
 "She'd make her fortune on the stage."

The lady detective bit her lip in angry vex-
 ation at the thought of the clever manner in

Nick meantime tugged fiercely at his bonds, and succeeded in slightly loosening one of the cords about his wrists.

An expert in the untying business, it did not take him long to release himself.

Once free he proceeded to relieve his assistant of her bonds.

"Half the battle is won," he said, in a comforting tone, as they stood with clasped hands on the damp floor.

"I hope so."

Then they began an investigation of the cellar.

It appeared to have but one outlet, and that was barred by a heavy iron door.

In the corner of the cellar Nick found a stick of wood.

It had, probably, been used on his head by Mrs. Cooley and thrown into the corner after the detective had been overcome.

Nick's revolvers had been taken from him, but with his stick he felt able to make an effective resistance when his enemies should reappear.

After half an hour's walk up and down the cellar, during which time every square foot of floor and wall had been explored, Miss Jones said, despondingly:

"No chance of escape for us, I fear."

"Don't worry, Ida, we'll be out of here before morning."

As he spoke, he began to tap against the farther wall—the one opposite the iron door by which they must have entered.

To his surprise the wall gave forth a hollow sound.

He tapped another place, a few feet away.
 Dull—solid.

On the other side, a few feet from the first attempt, he next tried the stick.

Dull again.

Further tapping revealed the fact that hollow sounds could be obtained in a space three feet square beginning at the floor.

The wall in other places was of brick.

Here it was plain plaster over laths or thin strips of boards.

His stick was not heavy enough to be of use in attacking the wall at the weak point, so he began kicking at the plaster with his feet.

In a few minutes he had made a hole large enough to admit his body.

The cool air rushed in through the aperture.

"I understand," he said, as he paused in his work a moment, "and if we are not soon on the Bowery I'll miss my guess."

Miss Jones experienced a thrill of intense relief.

Presently Nick had enlarged the aperture so that she could crawl through with ease.

The detective went first to assure himself that all was safe beyond, and then assisted her to follow.

They were still far below the surface of the ground, but above them was no other covering than the star-studded heavens.

In the half light they could distinguish their surroundings.

The place they were now in was or had been a cellar, like the one they had just emerged from, but it had caved in, and the greater part of it was filled with bricks and debris.

"Where are we?" asked Miss Jones, wonderingly.

"Not far from Greene street, in the ruins of a building that was destroyed by fire several years ago.

"The main part fronting on the street was rebuilt, but the rear which at one time was devoted to tenements was allowed to remain as the fire left it.

"In the old days, if I reason correctly, and from my knowledge of this quarter I think I do, the cellar we just crawled out of communicated with the one we are in now, and must have been used for nefarious purposes by the gang of criminals who used to infest this neighborhood.

"The opening between the two cellars was probably closed after the fire, but I don't think Red Mike or the villains who entrapped us have the least idea that the hole was not closed with brick to match the walls about it."

The great detective and his assistant now made an attempt to get out of the cellar.

"Looking upward Nick judged the distance from the bottom to the lowest section to the broken wall above to be about twenty feet.

He climbed the highest pile of debris, to find to his disappointment that it was not more than six feet from the floor.

He examined the walls for crevices by means of which he might work his way upward.

But none that were serviceable could be found.

"We are not out of the woods yet," he remarked rather gloomily when he gave up his search.

Miss Jones was stooping down tugging at something when Nick spoke.

"I've made a discovery of some kind," she said.

Nick went to her assistance, and found that she was trying to lift a trap-door by means of the rusty iron ring held by a staple.

Their combined efforts resulted in success.

The door was raised, and a dark, foul-smelling hole was revealed.

It was too dark to see how deep it was, and Nick had no matches, for the thieves who had entrapped him had emptied his pockets of everything he possessed.

But a broken brick thrown downwards proved that the depth was not more than seven or eight feet.

"I'm going down there," said Nick, resolutely, "for the hole may be the means of our deliverance."

"And it may lead into the den of the enemy," returned Miss Jones.

"No matter," said Nick, grimly, "for I feel able at this moment with this stick to fight a dozen men."

He said no more, but swung himself down the trap.

As his feet touched bottom he exclaimed: "I'm in a sort of sub-cellar, and it's got an outlet beyond, for I can see a thin streak of light ahead of me."

He was about to ask his lady assistant to remain above until he called her, when she descended close by his side.

"You may need help," she said, quietly, but resolutely, "and I am here to give it."

The courageous woman had armed herself with a brick, and she walked by Nick's side as he hastened forward in the direction of the light.

As the detective had imagined, it came from the cracks of a door.

The door was of wood, and to Nick's surprise and satisfaction it was not locked.

He had turned the knob and partially opened it, when a light, which had come from a lantern, went out, and a pistol-shot was

heard close at hand, which was quickly followed by another and another.

Regardless of his personal safety the detective rushed out to ascertain the cause of the shooting.

Loud cries and curses greeted his ears from the long corridor in which he found himself.

"D—n you, take that," hissed a voice he recognized as Matt Cooley's, and a heavy thud was heard the next instant, followed by a shriek of mortal agony.

Some one had been murdered.

Nick thought of Chick and Patsy, and with lips compressed and eyes flashing ominously he pressed forward for the scene of the tragedy, stick in hand.

A door suddenly opened in front of him as he hurried on, and a flood of light was thrown into the corridor.

A strange spectacle met the great detective's eyes.

In the door beyond stood Red Mike.

On the floor before him two men were struggling in a deadly embrace, while just beyond them was another man lying dead with his head in a pool of blood.

For one second Nick gazed at the scene, and then, on the impulse of the moment, he sprang forward, and brought his stick of wood down on Red Mike's head.

The saloon keeper was taken completely by surprise, for his eyes had been riveted upon the combatants, and he had not seen the detective.

As Red Mike fell and did not move Ida Jones made use of the brick which she had brought from the cellar above.

It struck one of the combatants on the floor between the eyes, and made him see more stars than ever the heavens had unfolded to his gaze.

Then the man he had been struggling with arose to his feet.

"The tricky cuss wears brass knuckles," he said, "and I got a taste of them just now."

The speaker was Chick.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FLAT ROBBER IN THE TOILS.

Nick gave Chick a look of approval, and then both of them proceeded to bind the two living rascals hand and foot.

When this operation was over Nick stooped to gaze into the face of the man who was lying in a pool of blood.

It was that of a ruffian who had given the police much trouble.

He had been a Bowery fighter, a tough of the worst description, and during his life could have been hired for the commission of any crime however heinous, murder not excepted.

"Plug Masson," said Nick, in surprise. "And how did this happen, Chick?"

"Matt Cooley made a mistake, that's how."

"I see. He took Masson for you in the darkness."

"You've struck it."

"Now tell me how you came here."

"Piping Jim Wallace brought me here."

"You shadowed him from the moment he left the ferry and got on the Elevated at East Twenty-third street?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"I was a passenger on the car with him in my new character of the Dutchman, and I followed him to a house in East One Hundred and Thirty-eighth street, where he lives."

"Ah! that's news, indeed, Chick. And what kind of a house is it?"

"A regular palace, Madison avenue can't show up a finer."

"Just as I thought."

"He went in this swell place," Chick continued, "and staid there an hour. A servant let him in."

"When he came out a handsome woman kissed him good-by at the door."

"That was his Connecticut wife."

"I found that out by overhearing what they said."

" 'Good-by, Jim,' were her words, 'and don't be out late to-night, for we're to go to Connecticut to-morrow, you know.'"

" 'I'll be back before midnight, Jennie, sure.'"

" 'I'll sit up for you then,' she said."

"Wallace left her to board an Eighth avenue car."

"He got off at the Park, and went on to a shady spot near the Croton Reservoir."

"Here he was met by Plug Masson.

"I was within hearing distance, but concealed from view when they began talking.

"It seems that our quarry had made an appointment for this place with Matt Cooley.

Matt had not come, but had sent Plug instead.

"The news the Bowery bravo brought almost paralyzed Wallace.

" 'Nick Carter is onto you,' Plug said, 'and one of his detectives expects to meet you tonight at Red Mike's.'

" 'The duse she does,' Wallace ejaculated, in alarm. 'But I won't be there, though.'

" 'Oh, yes, you will,' says Masson, and related to him the scheme Matt Cooley and his clever wife had rigged up to entrap you and Miss Jones.

"Wallace breathed a sigh of relief when he had grasped the situation.

" 'I think I will go down to Mike's,' he said, with a fierce oath, 'and I'll square accounts with the man who put me in a hole six years ago.'

"I shadowed the pair," said Chick, "and saw them enter a tough crib on Greene street.

"They passed through the bar-room to the rear, and then I lost sight of them.

"It was after dark, and I hunted about the back premises until I began to fear that if I staid there much longer I might not be in time to save you and Miss Jones from the terrible fate that was evidently in store for both of you.

"I knew the pair would finally bring up at Red Mike's in the Bowery, and I was well satisfied that there was a means of communication between this shebang and the Greene street crib.

" 'I'll go to Mike's,' I said to myself, 'and I'll clean out the whole place, but I'll find the men I'm after.' "

"That's old reckless Chick that spoke then," said Nick with a smile.

But the smile was an approving one.

"I got into the Bowery and into Mike's just as Matt Cooley was coming out of the back room.

"He paid no attention to me, and I could see that his face was very pale and that he was breathing heavily.

"My heart sank then, for I feared that he and Wallace might have got away with you, Nick, for good, while as for Miss Jones——"

Chick hesitated, and the lady assistant shuddered at the thought of the terrible danger which she had escaped.

"What did Cooley do?" asked Nick, quickly.

"He called Red Mike aside, and they held a whispered consultation of a few moments' duration.

"Then Mike handed Cooley a big key, and the latter went to the door of the back room, opened it, and passed from sight.

"What could I do?"

"If I followed I would have Red Mike at my heels and a score of toughs besides for aught I knew to the contrary.

"I was willing to buck against these odds if the worst came to the worst, but in a flash a better way to work my points was suggested.

"I walked carelessly to the door so as to excite suspicion, and when I got outside I yelled 'Fire!' with all my might.

"The bar-room was cleared in an instant, Red Mike being the first to reach the sidewalk.

"He had an idea that old rattletrap of a building that held his disreputable joint might be in danger.

"I slid into the saloon during the excitement that followed, and was out of sight in the back room before he returned to his place behind the bar.

"A door was open on the side.

"It was a secret arrangement, and slid back into the partition."

"That was not the door I was taken through," said Nick.

"No, because you went into the cellar."

"Yes."

"I did not stop to ask why it had been left open—though I think now it was Cooley's carelessness that did it—but hurried through the opening into a corridor, which led to a stairway going downward.

"A lantern's light warned me to be careful as I went down the stairs.

"At the first landing I heard voices.

"Two men were in conversation—Matt Cooley and Plug Masson.

"They had left you, Nick, and Miss Jones bound and insensible in the cellar, and they were discussing the best means of getting rid of both of you forever.

"Masson was for knocking you on the head, and dumping you into the river, while Cooley, well, never mind what Cooley proposed. It was something worse, though, you may be assured."

Again Miss Jones shuddered.

"I soon discovered that the two villains were in a sub-cellar," resumed Chick, "and that it ran along parallel with Red Mike's bar-room, and that one means of entering it was by a stairway directly under the bar counter."

"Where we are, now?" said Nick.

"Yes."

"They were moving toward the stairway where I was, in order to go back and drag their victims down to the sub-cellar, which I imagined communicated in some portion with the sewer.

"I made a step upward to get out of the way when as luck would have it one of my keys fell from a hole in my pocket, and went rattling down the stairs.

"A shout from the trio of villains warned me that my presence had been discovered.

"There was but one thing to do, and that was to make a bold stand.

"I therefore turned, whipped out my revolver, and blazed away as they came for me.

"The first shot struck the lantern which Cooley held, and the sub-cellar was in darkness in an instant.

"What happened afterward you can readily surmise.

"Cooley mistook Masson for your humble servant, and put a knife into him.

"He discovered his mistake only when I clutched him by the throat."

The great detective was disappointed at the absence of Wallace from the scene.

If the clever flat robber had gone away from the premises with the idea that all was safe, and that Miss Jones and Nick were prisoners, the way would be clear to his arrest under proper conditions.

The question, then, was, had he left the place, or was he concealed somewhere?

The answer came in a moment in a most surprising way.

A voice called down from the bar-room through the opening by which Red Mike had reached the sub-cellar.

It was the voice of Jim Wallace, and it said:

"How is it, Matt? All right?"

Cooley had recovered consciousness, and was about to answer in words that would have spoiled the game for Nick Carter, had not the latter instantly raised his stick over the prostrate villain's head, and hissed these words in a menacing whisper:

"Answer 'all right,' or I'll brain you."

Matt Cooley blinked his eyes, but kept his lips shut.

"Are you there, Matt?" came the voice again from above.

"For the last time," came the threatening whisper, "or——"

The stick was beginning to descend, when Cooley spoke.

"I'm here," he answered, "and it's all right."

"Shall I come down?"

"No."

"Good, for I promised Jennie to be home before twelve. But say, didn't I hear a pistol shot or two a minute ago?"

"It was shooting at a bat."

This answer was prompted by Nick.

"Where's Mike?"

"Gone to see the prisoners."

"That's right. Keep them till to-morrow; then we'll fix 'em. Good night."

"Good night."

The conversation ceased.

Nick whispered a few words to Chick.

Young Hercules nodded, and when Jim Wallace reached home his meeting with his wife at the door was witnessed by Nick's faithful assistant.

Before the great detective and Miss Jones left Red Mike's they learned that the subterranean rooms and passages which they had traversed had been used in by-gone days by a powerful secret society of criminals.

Matt Cooley and Mike were conveyed to the Tombs, and Nick having received assurance from Inspector Steers that the fact of

the arrest should be kept secret for twenty-four hours, went home and took a much-needed rest.

It is needless to say that Miss Jones slept well, also.

Chick was not so fortunate, for he remained all night watching Jim Wallace's palatial house.

At ten o'clock in the forenoon of the next day, the clever flat robber left his home and went to a livery stable on East One Hundred and Thirty-seventh street, where he hired a horse, and light wagon for the ostensible purpose of driving to the races.

In front of a house on West One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street he stopped, and alighted.

Chick and Nick were not far away.

Wallace went to the door, had a few words of conversation with the servant, and then went inside.

In a short time he came out hurriedly with bulging pockets, and, jumping into the wagon, drove rapidly off.

He was followed to a Harlem pawnshop, and, while he was showing a diamond ring and diamond collar button to the pawnbroker, Nick and Chick entered quickly and arrested him.

He fought like a tiger, but was soon overpowered.

After he had been taken to police headquarters, the two detectives proceeded to his house on East One Hundred and Thirty-eighth street.

His pretty wife was found in the parlor in easy conversation with Miss Ida Jones.

This time the lady detective had worked her points well.

Mrs. Wallace No. 2 was not of a vicious turn of mind, and she talked freely and frankly when she found such a sympathizer as Miss Ida Jones proved to be.

The house was furnished like a palace, and

the stolen plunder that was removed from it approximated twenty thousand dollars in value.

Nearly all the different articles were afterward identified by Harlem flat tenants.

Mrs. Wallace cried bitterly when informed that her darling Jim had been arrested, and declared that he was hers, and that she was going to have him again, despite the law and that other woman.

Mrs. Cooley made her escape, and still is at large.

Her husband and Red Mike got six years each.

Nick Carter took such an interest in the case that he personally accompanied Jim Wallace to the criminal court.

"Your career of crime is over," said Nick, as he conducted Wallace from the wagon to the court room, in Chambers street.

Jim Wallace was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to fourteen years and six months in the State prison.

The judge, in passing sentence, complimented Nick Carter and his assistants for the valuable work they had done for the benefit of society, in ridding it for a long time of the presence of one of the most deeply-dyed criminals in the United States.

As for Inspector Steers, his gratitude to Nick for his quick and effective campaign was unbounded.

Patsy came over from Brooklyn too late to be of any service at the wind-up.

"Never mind," he said, mysteriously, "you haven't got Mrs. Cooley yet. Perhaps she'll fall into my hands some day. Who knows?"

(THE END)

The next number of the Nick Carter Weekly will contain "Killed at the Baths; or Nick Carter Right On Hand," by the author of "Nick Carter.



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